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TAGS: PGOV KPKO ASEC CG  
SUBJECT: INTER-MILITIA CLASHES THREATEN ITURI, S SECURITY

REF: KINSHASA 1387

Classified By: PolOff CBrown, reasons 1.4 b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary: Rival FNI and MRC militia forces clashed last month in DR Congo's Ituri District. Precise reasons remain unknown, but appear to encompass elements of turf war, militia recruitment and ethnic protection. For now, the fighting is limited in area, but risks disturbing the delicate security situation in Ituri before the October 29 elections. Local officials are attempting to calm tensions. Continued delays in disarming and demobilizing these militias risks the return of wider-spread violence in the region. End summary.

¶2. (C) Forces loyal to Peter Karim's Front for National Integration (FNI) and Mathieu Ngonjolo's Congolese Revolutionary Movement (MRC) clashed twice in late September in the northeastern part of DR Congo's Ituri District. The fighting remains highly localized. However, it is a break from recent, tacit cooperation between Karim and Ngongolo.

¶3. (C) MONUC military officials report that on September 18 a group of about 100 armed men in military uniforms threw "bombs" into Karim's camp in the town of Jiba, approximately 35 miles northeast of Bunia. They returned the next morning, engaged in a firefight with FNI militia in the village market, burned down Karim's camp, and proceeded to harass villagers and loot the local mission hospital. Two civilians were killed and one wounded.

¶4. (C) MONUC investigations have concluded that the attackers were members of Ngonjolo's MRC militia, augmented by Congolese army (FARDC) soldiers of Hema ethnicity; Karim's FNI is largely composed of ethnic Lendus. MONUC officials report that another series of FNI-MRC clashes took place in Jiba September 23, during which several houses were set on fire. Later, a small group of ethnic Lendus in a neighboring village destroyed the homes of several Hemas whom they suspected of being among the attackers.

¶5. (C) Exact reasons for the fighting are not known. Police authorities claim one of the likely causes was control over local markets, reportedly a source of illegal revenue for both militias. Police contacts also told MONUC that the MRC had attacked the FNI to evict it from Hema lands. National Assembly deputy Bura Pulunyo said the ethnic component to the fighting is growing, as local Lendus increasingly see their compatriot Karim as the sole protection against Hema militias and FARDC troops.

¶6. (C) MONUC Chief Military Information Officer Lt. Col. Mike Burke told us the fighting also amounted to an MRC-FNI turf war. He said the FNI had begun recruiting members in

territory historically controlled by the MRC and Ngonjolo, effectively poaching on MRC turf. He said both militias are trying to increase their ranks in advance of disarmament and demobilization, since the "benefits" both Karim and Ngongolo will receive are based on the number of members they bring with them out of the bush.

¶ 17. (C) On September 26, a MONUC military observer team in Jiba was openly harassed and detained by FNI militia, while investigating the two firefights. FNI troops surrounded the team, telling them it was not safe to enter the area, and threatened their interpreter, claiming he was an FARDC spy. The MONUC team was allowed to leave after an hour of negotiations. The FNI is the same group that killed one MONUC peacekeeper and held seven others hostage earlier this year.

¶ 18. (C) Ituri District Commissioner Petronille Vaweka said she will lead a delegation to Djugu territory in early October to speak with FNI members to try to ease tensions. She said she plans to issue a message in the near future calling on both militias to "calm down" and exercise restraint while awaiting demobilization. Her deputy had planned to lead a separate delegation of community leaders to deliver the same message to Ngonjolo and his followers. Meanwhile, MONUC has established two mobile operating bases in Djugu territory to better monitor developments and to provide a more visible security presence.

¶ 19. (C) Comment: Delays in demobilizing both Karim and Ngonjolo and their militias, along with underlying Hema-Lundu divisions, lie at the heart of this latest round of violence. Possible FARDC instigation of, or involvement in,

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these events will only serve to bolster militia resolve and local resentment. Footdragging by both the militias and the GDRC have resulted in the militias rearming, regrouping, and regaining control of parts of Ituri, which could lead to wider destabilization. End comment.

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